

STATEMENT OF JANET SNYDER MATTHEWS, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR FOR CULTURAL RESOURCES, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS AND PUBLIC LANDS, COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING H.R. 1815, TO EXTEND THE AUTHORIZATION FOR THE COASTAL HERITAGE TRAIL IN THE STATE OF NEW JERSEY.

JULY 12, 2007

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before your committee to present the Department of the Interior's views on H.R.1815, to extend the authorization for the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail Route for an additional four years.

The Department supports enactment of this bill with two amendments.

The Act of October 20, 1988 authorized the Secretary to designate a vehicular tour route in coastal New Jersey and to prepare an inventory of sites along the route. An interpretive program was also mandated to provide for public appreciation, education, understanding and enjoyment of important fish and wildlife habitats, geologic and geographical landforms, cultural resources, and migration routes in coastal New Jersey. The Secretary was authorized to provide technical assistance, prepare and distribute information, and erect signs along the route. The trail links national wildlife refuges, national parklands, National Historic Landmarks, and National Register sites with important historic communities, state parks, natural areas, and other resources to tell the story of New Jersey's role in shaping U.S. history and in providing internationally important habitats for bird and other migrations.

The trail, an affiliated area of the National Park System, is a partnership among the National Park Service, the State of New Jersey, and many local government and private non-profit partners. Through interpretation of five themes (Maritime History, Coastal Habitats, Wildlife Migration, Relaxation & Inspiration, and Historic Settlements), the trail brings attention to important natural and cultural resources along coastal New Jersey. The trail demonstrates the potential of new public/private partnerships that allow the National Park Service to meet its core mission of natural and cultural resource preservation along with interpretation and public education in a cost-efficient manner through technical assistance while reducing operational responsibilities. No Federal funds are used for operations, maintenance, or repair of any road or related structure.

Extending the authorization of the trail would enable the National Park Service to complete implementation of the trail plan, as supported by the public and our partners. Without additional time and funding, the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail Route will be left incomplete. Implementation of the plan is also critical in building a base of sustainable partners and developing a strategy for the long-term management of the trail. Additionally, commitments to trail partners would go unfulfilled, and many additional natural and cultural resources would not receive the partnership assistance leveraged by the trail.

Public Law 109-338, the National Heritage Areas Act of 2006, reauthorized federal funding for the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail Route until September 30, 2007, while also requiring a strategic plan to be prepared by the Secretary three years after funds are made available. The current sunset date of September 30, 2007 does not provide adequate time to complete the preparation of the strategic plan. The strategic plan is an important tool to help the trail develop

a long-term management strategy that includes a variety of options for sustainability of the trail. In order to carry out this provision, the authorization for federal funding for the trail should be extended to September 30, 2011, to match the time period for the completion and transmittal of the strategic plan.

The Department recommends two amendments to the bill. First, we recommend that the long title of the bill be amended to use the generally accepted name of the trail, which is the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail Route. Second, the current authorization of appropriations for the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail Route is limited to the Secretary providing technical assistance and funds for the design and fabrication of interpretive materials, devices and signs. All federal funds under the enabling legislation require a non-federal, one-to-one match. We recommend that H.R. 1815 be amended to authorize the Secretary to use federal funding to complete the strategic plan since the current authorization does not allow for funds to be used for this purpose.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the committee may have.